

Christian Education

An address by

A. C. REID

Professor of Philosophy

Wake Forest College

Wake Forest, N. C.

Delivered to

**BAPTIST STATE CONVENTION
OF NORTH CAROLINA**



November 12, 1952

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A person's education begins the day of his birth. It affects every type of his thought and conduct. It provides information and establishes ideals. It forms social standards, controls moral sensitivity, and directs loyalties. A person's education cultivates his interests, shapes his motives, and guides his devotions.

Now, Christian education, I am convinced, is unique and imperative. It is unique because it is intellectual development in harmony with the truth revealed by Jesus Christ. It is imperative because it emphasizes the Christian principles which enable people and institutions to become free.

In this address I shall point out four things: 1. Truths basic to Christian education; 2. Existing situations; 3. The need to teach spiritual reality; and, 4. Some essentials of a Christian school.

CHRISTIAN TRUTHS

Let me remind you, therefore, first of all, that Christian education must rest upon Christian truths. The primary objective of education is knowledge. The essence of knowledge is wisdom. Wisdom is appreciation of truth and righteousness. Jesus Christ is the revelation of the Supreme Truth and ethical principles.

For example, our Master revealed the fact and nature of God. He knew that God is infinite and supreme. He proclaimed God as Creator and Sovereign of the universe.

Our Lord also revealed the spiritual nature of man. He knew that every person is an immortal soul; and he, therefore, evaluated every person in terms of spiritual reality and eternal destiny. His life was a declaration of the Fatherhood of God, and of God's concern for every one of his children; his ministry was an effort to lead people to realize and to respect their divine heritage.

Our Master, furthermore, revealed moral law. He knew that this is a moral universe. He recognized moral absolutes; and, in plain words, he stated the enduring nature of moral principles. He declared that, although heaven and earth will pass away, not the least part of divine law will cease to exist. He also showed that the sanctions of spiritual law are inescapable. It was no idle speech when our Lord said to the lawyer: ". . . this do, and thou shalt live." It was no mere expression of sentiment when he described the final judgment. Moral laws are principles; principles are attributes of

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Reality; Reality is God. The court of the moral order never recesses; the Supreme Judge is never deceived.

Now such truths as these — the reality of God, of the human soul, and of moral law — are foundational to Christian education. They are essential to hope, faith, and enduring values. They affirm the unity of the universe. They are permanent standards of thought and practice; for God is sovereign, a person is morally responsible, and divine law is eternal and unchangeable.

EXISTING SITUATIONS

The application of education to Christian truth requires two things. In the first place, our fine resources — people, organizations and institutions — must become positively aware of Christ's truth and fully devoted to the principles of Christian living. With full consecration and wise determination, our influence would be revolutionary. Our first concern, therefore, is the development of spiritual excellence in ourselves, our organizations and our institutions.

Second, we must fight evil forces that corrupt human minds, destroy human lives, and threaten human freedom. Let me specify.

J. Edgar Hoover reports that about two million serious crimes are committed annually in our country; and he states that crime is on the increase. Crime reflects the mental quality of people who disregard moral principles and become victims of license, greed, and selfish interests.

The twentieth century has brought the greatest orgy of blood in human history. We have had two World Wars — wars, I remind you, in which Christian nation fought Christian nation. Another war is now in progress. We constantly fear a third World War which, if it occurs, could wreck civilization.

Then, too, the stability of a nation depends upon the moral soundness of its citizens. If our national economy should collapse, our depleted moral reserves would make it relatively easy for a dictator to appear.

Moreover, in various ways, we are delegating our privileges and responsibilities to central authorities. We are so enamored of physical security and efficiency that we are disposed to let the State direct business, supervise professions, and control education. The despotism of Nazi Germany and Communist Russia are frightening evidence that, somewhere between state control and human freedom, there is a sacred and vital line. We must preserve that line at all costs and protect it as with a ring of fire.

Furthermore, as you know, a Titanic struggle is in progress between atheistic communism and Christian freedom. A fanatical and unscrupulous monster, a one-eyed Cyclops, now controls 800 mil-

lion people in Russia, China, Poland and other countries; and his fifth columns operate in virtually every other nation, including these United States. And let us not forget that this cunning enemy likes nothing better than to invade education and religion.

Again, from a more general point of view, a world revolution is in progress. In Asia, in Africa, in Europe, and in America, masses of humanity are stirring. A vast tide of unrest, a ground swell of human dissatisfaction, a huge stampede of unbridled desire for something different, if not something better, is sweeping over the world. Hosts of people are blindly on the march. Now, unscrupulous and selfish leaders capitalize on ignorance, suffering and restlessness, and they will exploit and enslave these hordes unless Christian people guide them.

I have mentioned our resources and I have named some existing evils, in order to stress our enormous educational responsibility. Christian education is no mere local matter. Its function includes the preservation of every cherished freedom, every fine ideal, and every great institution of freedom-loving people everywhere.

IMPERATIVE THAT WE TEACH SPIRITUAL REALITY

If we are to have free and unconquerable people, sound education is imperative. Ignorance appears in many forms. But whether it is attractive or ugly, whether it is in the guise of illiteracy or cleverness, it is the breeding ground of evils and a source of weakness, tragedy, and suffering. If we allow ignorance to enshroud them, our free people and free institutions will not survive. When a small Greek force had crushed a vast Persian army, the Persian queen asked: What manner of men are these Greeks? The reply was: "To no living man are they slaves, nor do they bow to any man's word." Knowledge of Christ's truth and devotion to that truth would make us free and unconquerable.

We must, therefore, face squarely and clearly the status of education. Our Christian duty demands that we observe and evaluate influences that affect thought and inspire action. The necessary examination is not easy.

For example, do we, as Christians, actually have a genuine interest in present situations? Do we really wish to see conditions as they are and to apply remedies where needed?

For illustration, to what extent do we cultivate in our children a taste for that which is honest, honorable, gracious, temperate, and wise? How greatly concerned are we — we who are parents, pastors, members of diaconates — about immoral forces that invade our homes and communities and pollute and warp the minds and lives

of our youth? Juvenile delinquency is usually parental delinquency reflected by youth.

Are we deeply concerned about conditions that promote human suffering? Intemperance is widespread; it exists in many forms; it is found in high places and in low places. Our apathy permits and even encourages intemperance. It is nice to pass resolutions, and it is necessary to enact laws to restrain irresponsible people and curb immoral interests; it is imperative, however, that we who profess to be Christians develop the spirit of temperance and the practice of temperance, and that we cultivate temperance in others.

Again, what are our criteria of success and superior achievement? Are they not scientific and technological improvement, professional advancement, and, for most of us, money and what money can buy? Now, I hasten to say that I am profoundly grateful for the amazing achievements of science, and that I applaud honorable ambition and success in any worthy field. The Good Samaritan had initiative, money, skill, and material resources, as well as a kind heart and a good name. Then, what is our error?

Our mistake is our failure to teach spiritual reality. Education is lopsided. While it has emphasized the scientific and the practical, it has neglected the idealistic and the spiritual. Now, a result of this neglect is that a host of people no longer believe there exists a great body of spiritual truth. For example, some suggest that religion should restrict itself to man and man's welfare. Last year, in an opinion, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States said: "There is nothing more certain in modern society than the principle that there are no absolutes." A prominent author suggests that the concept of the State should be substituted for the idea of God. The man who, perhaps more than any other person, has shaped American education seems to say that truth is only human opinion, and that God is a product of human imagination. Our failure to teach spiritual reality — whether in our homes, our schools, or our pulpits — encourages religious agnosticism, produces belief in moral relativism, prepares the seedbed of atheism, and invites political tyranny.

Now, are we prepared to teach spiritual reality? What would you do if a person, in complete sincerity, should ask you plain questions about spiritual matters? Could you explain the nature of faith? Could you show the vast difference between honesty as an ethical principle and honesty as the best policy? In view of the facts of astronomy, geology and anthropology, can you prove that a person is unique and imperishable? Are you able to convince a person that he is an immortal soul? Are you capable of proving that prayer is

answered? Can you convince a man of the existence of God, or the goodness of God?

These questions are no fictions. Some of us, who have endured the ordeal of such an examination, realize how poorly prepared we are, and how miserably we fail.

Why is it that we are so negligent, so uninformed, so pitifully unprepared in the most vital of all areas of life? Why are the best minds, the most exact training, and the most persistent efforts found in such areas as science and technology, and some of the professions? Why is it that intellectual honesty is demanded and respected in science, but so much prejudice and jealousy exist in some other places? Is the atom more attractive than the human soul? Are legal statutes more important than moral principles? Is travel in the stratosphere more significant than passage in eternity? Does any man have a greater responsibility than a preacher who, from the pulpit, speaks to immortal souls in the name of the Eternal God?

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

The Christian school is vital to the Christian program. The function of the Christian school is the development of great spiritual leaders. Its objective is the production of wise and consecrated men and women who think deeply, who judge wisely, and who have the courage of their profound convictions. Let me state, therefore, three conditions which a Christian school must meet.

First, the school must conform to Christian principles. It must be honest and honorable in all of its policies and practices. It must, constantly and without apology, search for the truth, respect the truth, and teach the truth, unswayed by intellectual fads, or by any social, political, or economic pressures. The very right of existence of a Christian school rests in its respect for intellectual honesty, its devotion to the truth, and its loyalty to the principles of a God-centered order.

Second, the academic function of a Christian school is unique and limited. The Christian school must commit itself to a special type of work that conforms to the school's right of existence, and it must do that work according to the highest standards. It must not try to teach everybody and everything. It must not spread out into commercial pursuits, skills, and techniques. Its proper function is emphasis on disciplines foundational to intellectual growth, moral excellence, and the production of wise and courageous leaders. Academic mediocrity, on the undergraduate or the graduate level, handicaps human minds, restricts human lives, and is both defeatist and un-Christian.

Third, the Christian school must have great teachers. Great teach-

ers vitalize the truth, and they inspire students to have a passion for the truth. In personality, in scholarship, and in work, the teaching staffs of our schools must consist of persons who represent Christian culture at its best.

Now, a great teacher requires freedom to think and to teach. A teacher's mind and soul and work are not merchandise subject to barter. Neither the whim and caprice of public taste nor vested interests can sway his ideals or dictate his conscience. His only fear is of ignorance and unrighteousness; his only law is the Spirit of Truth; his only master is Jesus Christ.

Our sons and daughters deserve great teachers. The promotion of our Christian faith requires great teachers. Unless our students have the finest quality of instruction, our homes will suffer, our religious press will become ineffective, our pews will become infirm, our pulpits will become weak, and our faith will become obscure.

In the present international crisis we must, of course, be prepared to meet force with force. But the real crisis of our time is a crisis in the souls of people. Freedom cannot be had and we will not be saved by some organization, slogan, catch-word, or deft manipulation. We can be saved only by a change in the hearts of men. Christian education is a primary means of effecting that change through the development of men and women who, with true insights, will be wise and commanding leaders in Christian faith and practice.

When the tyrant Creon condemned Antigone to death because she had defied him in doing a thing that was right and honorable, just before her execution, with supreme courage Antigone looked the despot squarely in the eye and said:

"No ordinance of man shall override
The settled laws of nature and of God.
Not written these in pages of a book,
Nor were they framed today or yesterday.
We know not whence they are, but this we know,
That they from all eternity have been
And shall to all eternity endure."

We have the enduring truth of God, revealed in Christ. It is our sacred privilege and responsibility to say to people everywhere: Upon this truth, with God's help, we shall stand and our institutions shall stand.

